

The Fruits of Their Labours

By Virginia Wilkinson

Saskatchewan is well known for its ability to produce cereal crops—but who would guess it also produces high quality tree fruits?

Located in the Qu'Appelle Valley just 30 minutes from Regina, Over the Hill Orchards is growing sour and sweet cherries, grapes, plums, pears, peaches, nectarines and apricots. It also produces strawberries, raspberries, blackberries and more. All of the fruit produced is certified organically grown.

Owners Dean and Sylvia Kreutzer

were city dwellers until 11 years ago. Dean was a computer programmer, and Sylvia was a travel agent. While Sylvia grew up on a farm in northern Saskatchewan, Dean was born and raised in the city.

It was during a trip to the local garden centre that they discovered the wide range of fruit trees available to Regina gardeners.

"They had pears, plums, grapes and cherries—I was blown away. I didn't know we could grow these in Saskatchewan," says Dean.

"It made me wonder—why aren't we growing them here like they do in the Okanagan?"

The couple planted some fruit trees in their backyard and grew fruit for their own consumption. The following year, they moved to an acreage near Lumsden and took their fruit trees with them. Their new home came with 40 acres of land. "I took a look at the land and thought, wow, that's a lot of land. We could do a lot with that," says Dean.

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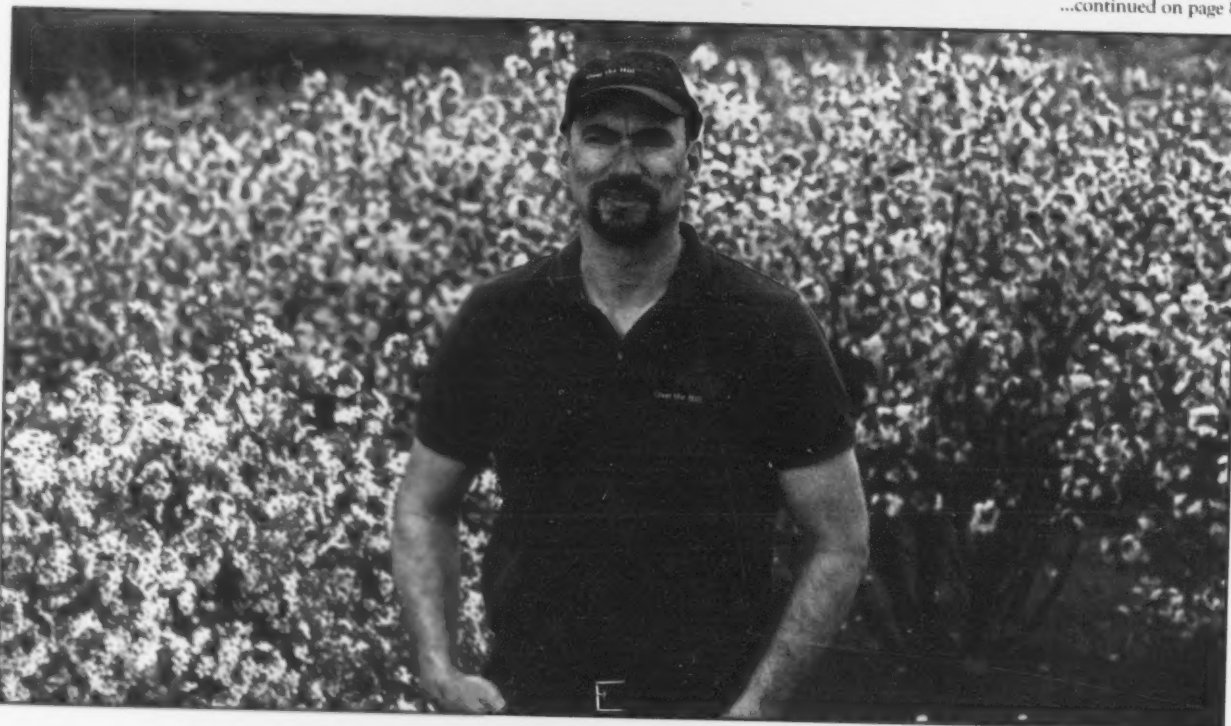


Photo by Keith Moulding

Dean Kreutzer of Over the Hill Orchards

The Thrill of the Grille

By Virginia Wilkinson



Photo by Keith Moulding

For the past 16 years, Regina-based Cloud-Rider Designs Ltd. has led the industry in the development of stainless steel grille inserts for cars, trucks, vans and SUVs—and today they are the only automotive accessory designer/manufacturer distributing CFL-licensed mud flaps, grille emblems and hitch covers.

Karen and Joe Cicansky started Cloud-Rider out of their home in 1995. It was the first company to design and distribute stainless steel vehicle grille covers, rather than the plastic covers made by other companies. They were, in fact, the first company in North America to patent these unique products (for the

Jim Smith and Sheldon Cossar of Cloud-Rider Design first seven years, they contracted out the manufacturing of their grille covers). So unique was their product that it attracted the attention of some of the larger implement dealers. In the late 1990s, LUND challenged the Cloud-Rider patent on the grills... and lost.

Within a year of operation the

company was so successful it moved into a small warehouse in White City. In 1997 Cloud-Rider officials added stainless steel/recycled rubber stone stoppers (mudflaps) to their product line, and in 1998 they expanded again, moving into part of the old Dad's Cookies warehouse in White City.

In 2002, because of increasing demand for their products, the company moved into a Regina building and added a manufacturing line so they managed the manufacturing "in-house".

"It allowed us a lot more flexibility around what we could do," says Jim Smith, with Sales, Manufacturing and Licensing at Cloud-Rider. "Research and development wasn't as hard—we could make a product, and test it, and then revise it to make it better."

Today, in addition to mudflaps and grille inserts, the company sells tow flaps, sill guards, running boards and step liners.

In 2010, the company leveraged its design and manufacturing ability, and moved into the creation of CFL-licensed automotive accessories. Cloud-Rider is now the only company in the country licensed to create and distribute CFL-branded automotive accessories. It launched its new CFL-branded line in late spring of 2010, and within a short time had sold more than 1,400 pairs of mudflaps and 700 hitch covers. This year the company has added a CFL-branded stainless steel grille emblem.

Not surprisingly, the team that saw the most sales was the Saskatchewan Roughriders.

"About 95 per cent of the CFL-branded product we sell is Rider products," says Smith. "When we started

working on these products, we were told that generally 56 per cent of products sold were Rider-branded and about 44 per cent were other team brands. But 95 per cent of what we have sold to date has been Rider-branded products."

Cloud-Rider's CFL-branded products are now being sold in Canadian Tire and Federated Co-op stores across the country.

"When we started working on these products, we were told that generally 56 per cent of products sold were Rider-branded and about 44 per cent were other teams. But 95 per cent of what we have sold to date has been Rider branded products"

As a result of its move into CFL-licensed products, the company has recently been approached by Polaris Industries to create product for them. Because Polaris has more than 1,400 dealers across North America, the development of Polaris products will have a significant impact on the growth of Cloud-Rider over the next few years.

With the move into the creation of

CFL-branded products, Cloud-Rider officials recognized a niche industry that was virtually untapped. They decided to look at options for moving into the US market. After some research, in the fall of 2010 they decided to approach NASCAR about licensing to create NASCAR-branded products.

"Having the CFL license really helped," says designer Sheldon Cossar. "It gave us credibility to approach other licensees."

NASCAR approved their request, and Cloud-Rider began creating NASCAR-branded products over the winter. The NASCAR products are currently being sold through NASCAR.com. As well, NASCAR and Cloud-Rider are working with Wal-Mart on an initiative that could see the multinational department store chain carry NASCAR-branded automotive accessories later this year.

"To grow our business we need to get into bigger markets—we thought NASCAR would help us get there," says Cossar. "It was a natural fit because it was an automotive-based sport which fits with our products."

The past few years have seen significant changes for Cloud-Rider, and those changes will likely continue. The company is currently in discussion with a major automotive manufacturer about potentially creating licensed products for that organization. Smith expects the company will continue to evolve over time, as it moves more solidly into manufacturing a range of licensed automotive accessories.

The Thrill of the Grille

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Saskatchewan's Jeweller to the Stars

By Virginia Wilkinson

Regina-born Rachel Mielke has been designing and crafting luxury jewelry for just six years—but already her products are worn by the likes of Carrie Underwood, Sarah McLachlan, Michelle Obama, Barbara Walters, Celine Dion, and others.

Rachel, who graduated with a degree in Business Administration from the University of Regina in 2003, had a goal of creating her own business. After convocating, she accepted a position with the Women Entrepreneurs of Saskatchewan.

"I knew that I wanted to start my own businesses," says Mielke, "but I didn't know what it would be."

During her time at Women Entrepreneurs she saw many new business ideas come through the door, and it was the excitement around these new entities that motivated her to start a business that would fit her skills and passions. In 2005 she opened Urban Pearl Accessories and began designing and manufacturing high-end jewelry using sterling silver, gold, and high quality semi-precious gemstones.

"When I started making jewelry, it was a real passion of mine. I felt if I could make a company successful by designing jewelry, it would be the ultimate business for me."

Her goal was to become the number one designer jewelry brand in Canada. As a result, in 2007 she re-branded Urban Pearl to ensure it has a more national appeal, and changed the corporate name to Hillberg & Berk. It worked. Rachel targeted higher-end boutiques across the country and was able to get her products

in a large number of stores across the nation.

But for Rachel, that was just a first step. In 2008 she was given a rare opportunity to take her product to an Oscar Gifting Lounge ("Oscar" as in Academy Awards).

"I knew right from the beginning that I was going to have to promote H&B on a national level with a start-up budget, so I tried to do some non-traditional things. One of those things was going to an Oscar Gifting Lounge."

There was a hefty cost associated with



Photo by Keith Moulding

the opportunity, and it meant giving away a significant number of her best products—but the gifting paid off. More than 30 different celebrities took her jewelry home. She then leveraged her presence in the Oscar Gifting Lounge to create media interest in her product, and it landed more than \$100,000 in free public relations opportunities. She was featured in several national magazines and dozens of Canadian newspapers. She was also

interviewed on CTV National's flagship morning news program Canada AM.

Her presence in the Oscar Gifting Lounge also helped get her a contestant spot on CBC TV's *Dragons' Den*, where aspiring entrepreneurs pitch their business concepts and products to a panel of Canadian business moguls and potential investors.

Her appearance on the program resulted in a \$200,000 investment by

entrepreneur and philanthropist Brett Wilson, who also became a partner in the company.

Since then Hillberg & Berk has seen tremendous growth. The company's products are now sold in more than 60 high-end stores across the country, including a show room in Regina. Last year Hillberg & Berk had product sales exceeding \$1 million dollars.

In the fall of 2011, the company is opening an expanded showroom which will be open Tuesday to Saturday.

For Mielke, it's just the beginning. She believes the company can continue to expand its national distribution chain and continue to increase sales. She's recently leveraged her celebrity relationships to create a unique profile for Hillberg & Berk's new *Carpe Noctem* collection, and India's modeling/film megastar Lisa Ray will become the face of Hillberg & Berk.

"She had a really powerful and incredible story. She just went through a very rare form of cancer and she has just such a positive attitude and is now a champion for multiple myeloma awareness. She is really an amazing woman. It's a great fit for us to feature women whose causes we can help raise awareness for—it fits with our mandate to help empower women."

The future for Hillberg & Berk is extremely bright. Mielke says online sales, national sales and sales from her Regina showroom are all on the rise.

"Our growth has been really exciting," she says.

"When I started it was just me out of my home, and I had a couple of beads and a dream. By the end of summer we will be up to 12 staff members, our company is expanding rapidly—and I'm doing all I can to keep up!" —*RM*



Rachel Mielke and some examples of her Hillberg and Berk line

A New Way to Catch the Bus: Transit Tracking Services

By Virginia Wilkinson

Ever imagine a day when your bus would send you a text message telling you it was minutes away from your stop?

It's not something from Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. It's happening right now in Regina.

Regina-based CRL Engineering has recently developed a unique tool which uses "intelligent agent software" and GPS technology to track buses and relay the information through a website to transit passengers—in real time.

The technology grew out of lessons learned from an interactive science/art project which was linked to the Regina transit system and was created by students and researchers at the University of Regina in 2006. After the project had wrapped up, some of the individuals involved realized that similar technological principles could be used to address a key frustration associated with riding the bus: not knowing exactly when the bus will be arriving at a specific stop. The developers believed that the creation of a new technology could do more than simply eliminate riders' number-one frustration; it could also help to increase transit ridership.

"One of the things we found was that the art project was really popular with riders," says Raman Paranjape, CEO of CRL Engineering.

"We were really surprised by the number of hits our website got and how interested people were in this project. We realized we could take the work we had done on

the project and turn it into a very useful technology to help increase bus ridership."

As a result, in 2009, Craig Gelowitz (Manager, CRL Engineering; Research Engineer, TRILabs; Sessional Lecturer, University of Regina), Paranjape

"The Living Lab provides projects like this one with a real-world trial, which is so important to the success of the project—many projects like this one would never happen without access to a living lab environment"

(Professor, Faculty of Engineering, University of Regina), and Luigi Benedicenti (COO, CRL Engineering; Professor, Software Systems Engineering, University of Regina; Associate Vice President, Academic, University of Regina) created CRL Engineering and

began developing the TransitLive Configuration (TLC), their new transit tracking system.

Because the system had the potential to provide significant benefits to municipal infrastructure, CRL was able to access seed funding from Communities of Tomorrow (CT) which assists researchers developing new solutions in the area of sustainable municipal infrastructure. CRL was then able to leverage the agreement between the City of Regina, CT and the University of Regina, through which the City has agreed to act as a living lab for the live testing of inventions intended to improve municipal infrastructure.

"The Living Lab provides projects like this one with a real-world trial, which is so important to the success of the project—many projects like this one would never happen without access to a living lab environment," says Gelowitz.

In May, 2010 approximately one quarter of the city's buses were equipped with the CRL Engineering technology for a four-month trial. Passengers were able to use their laptops, smart phones, cell phones or even home phones to link to the transitlive.com website and check the location of their buses in real time. They were able to identify the bus stop of their choice; the system would then call the riders minutes before the bus arrived at their stop.

The system has significant benefits for transit riders, but it also provides benefits

to the transit authority.

"It allows you to know exactly where the bus is at all times. It's very hard for any transit authority to remain exactly on schedule, which creates a huge amount of frustration for people riding the bus—they don't know if the bus has come and gone, or has yet to come," says Paranjape.

"This system reduces that worry and stress."

Transit Live was so popular with passengers that when the four months were up, the City of Regina extended the trial for another 10 months. Over those 10 months, more than 38,000 text messages have been sent to the system, and the transitlive.com website is registering nearly 10,000 unique hits every month.

Gelowitz says one of the system's key features is that it virtually never goes down. He says it uses the Amazon cloud which promises 99.95 per cent uptime, and the ability to scale the application based on required usage.

The Transit Live system was featured at the Canada Urban Transit Association conference in May 2011, and received significant interest from conference participants; in fact, CRL has already been contacted by a number of transit authorities from across western Canada interested in the product. CRL officials are confident the system will soon be picked up by other transit authorities and suggest it may have potential for use with provincial transit companies or school bus companies in the future. *—W*

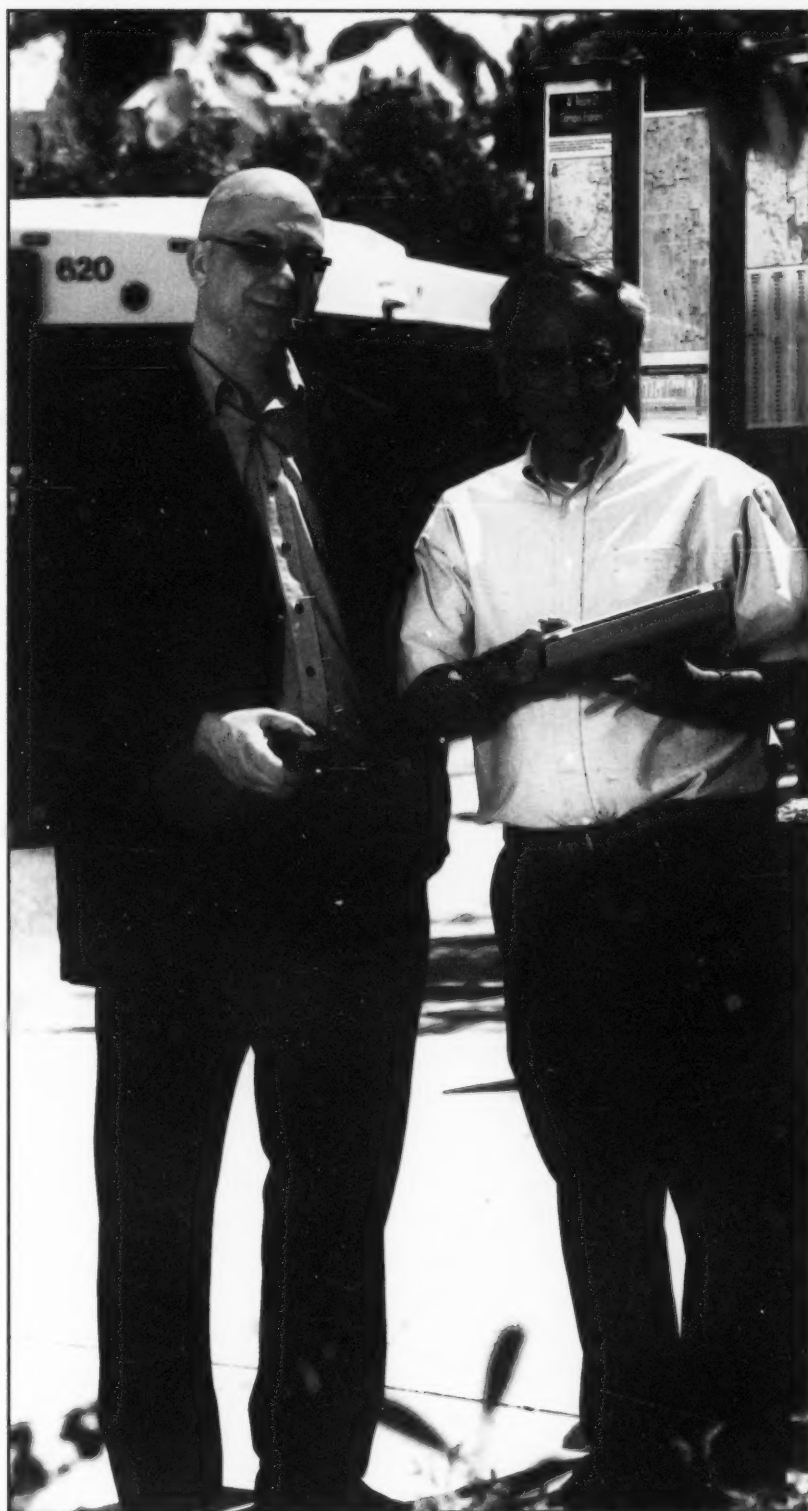


Photo by Kevin Hogarth

Craig Gelowitz and Raman Paranjape of CRL Engineering

The Fruits of Their Labours

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Because of the land and their passion for fruit growing, Dean and Sylvia began thinking about creating an orchard. They travelled to orchards around the country learning about fruit varieties and the associated climate and soil requirements. In 2000, they visited the University of Saskatchewan and tasted the sour cherry, which researchers in the Department of Plant Sciences had just developed.

"Sylvia looked at me and said, 'We have to grow these!'" says Dean.

In the summer of 2001 they planted their first cherry crop.

"The learning curve was vertical. A computer programmer knows absolutely zero about horticulture—so I started taking horticulture classes via correspondence through the Prairie Horticulture Certificate program," he said.

During the first few years they had many challenges and made a lot of mistakes. They dealt with grasshoppers and droughts—and they killed a lot of trees—but they learned a great deal in the process. "We really learned on the job. There were a lot of people who thought

we were crazy, but when you're passionate about something you can overcome quite a bit."

The following year they planted apples and grapes, later introducing plums and pears, and Dean then began fruit breeding to create hardier varieties of their fruit. It wasn't long before they began making products from their fruit. Over the Hill Orchards currently produces low sugar jams and toppings, cherry juices, fruit pies, dried cherries, cherry bark and chocolate covered cherries. The chocolate cherries have been such a hit they have been served to local celebrities, the Prime Minister of Canada, Canada's Governor General and even Queen Elizabeth II.

The fruit and the products are sold through the orchard's store and coffee shop in Lumsden, and the Regina Farmer's Market. The spreads, toppings, juices and chocolates are also available online and at organic and health food stores across Prairie provinces.

Because of the broad interest in their products, Dean and Sylvia are building a processing facility on site this summer.

According to Dean, the efficiencies created through the facility will enable the company to increase capacity, reduce costs and facilitate expansion into larger markets.

"We had interest from Costco about our cherry juice—they loved it, but our price was just too high. The new facility will help us address that."

Dean and Sylvia have many dreams for the orchard; moving into the tourist sector is one of them. Many people already visit the orchard during the orchard's regular Sunday tours. Dean says the new facility will include public space where tourists can enjoy coffee or tea and sample a fruit pie. It will also offer small conference room space for organizations wanting a unique location for business meetings and short conference sessions.

"We really want to get more people out to the orchard. In the future, we'd like to have tours coming through here," he says.

"Our goal is to be in the top five things to do in Regina." —

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